

## VII. THE DIGITAL ERA

*Sound moves out of grooves and into bytes*

With interest in classical music slowly but surely sinking, and interest in jazz overwhelmed by fusion and funk, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw a retraction and consolidation of labels interested in their promotion. The early model was the PolyGram Music Group, a rather friendly arrangement of European classical labels intended to group-market their product in an increasingly global economy.

Philips, under its corporate name of Philips Phonografische Industrie (PPI), was the first to attempt such a conglomeration. They first proposed a merger with British Decca in 1945, but it was rejected by Decca's Edward Lewis. In the early 1950s they proposed a merger with DGG. This, too, was initially rejected. Where PPI succeeded was with American Columbia. In 1951, after Columbia did not renew its international distribution agreement with EMI, PPI agreed to distribute Columbia recordings outside the US and have Columbia distribute its recordings inside the US. This agreement ran until 1961, when Columbia set up its own European network and PPI set out to make acquisitions in the US. But PPI continued to grow by building or buying factories in smaller countries. In 1962, PPI had a large factory in Baarn and factories in France, Britain, Denmark, Norway, Spain, Italy, Egypt, Nigeria and Brazil. That same year, they finally got DGG to agree to a merger whereby each label would manufacture each others' records, coordinate releases and not poach each others' artists or bid against each other for new talent. This was called the Grammophon-Philips Group. In 1972 the two labels merged formally to form the PolyGram Music Group; in 1977 the two companies also merged internationally. In 1973, PolyGram also acquired the United Distribution Company (UDC) and signed distribution deals with MCA and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Records in 1976.

Because of falling market shares, British Decca capitulated and became part of the Polygram group in 1979. But there were big problems on the horizon. Even before 1978, with the acquisition of UDC, the distribution organization was too large and PolyGram was sustaining losses. With US operations running at full capacity, PolyGram expanded aggressively, and would press large quantities of records without knowing the demand. In late 1979, the disco boom busted, leaving the company not only with an underutilized distribution network but with overoptimistic product orders and profligate labels. In 1983, Philips manager Jan Timmer was appointed CEO. He cut the workforce from 13,000 to 7,000, reduced PolyGram's LP and cassette plants from eighteen to five and decreased the company's dependence on superstars by spreading the repertoire across different genres and nurturing national and regional talent. By 1985, PolyGram was profitable once more.

After an attempted 1983 merger with Warner Music failed, Philips bought 40% of PolyGram from Siemens, and in 1987 the remaining 10%.

The PolyGram story, with its successes, failures and murky financial history, should have scared other labels away from a similar history. But human greed, as we have seen from the early history of the phonograph, almost always overcame common sense and sustainability. No record company since Edison's really wanted to remain an independent unit in which product quality was a marketing priority. Salability increasingly overwhelmed artistic judgment, and as time went on and art music was increasingly overwhelmed by a gluttonous, money-hungry pop market, their philosophy became much like the old joke: "Profit is Our Most Important Product."

Which is not to say that the earlier decades of the record industry were so entirely altruistic. No one would pretend that pianists like Schnabel, Cortot and Gieseking, for instance, true giants of their instrument, were not marginalized in the 1940s because they were not

glamorous marquee “stars” like Horowitz, Kapell or José Iturbi. But at least there was always the chance that Schnabel, Cortot or Gieseking would make new records and that those records would find their way onto the shelves; by the late 1970s, many of the best and brightest of the world’s musicians were shut out of the studio if they did not find a “marketing niche.”

In the jazz world, a similar conglomerate was formed by the old Music Corporation of America (MCA), originally just a booking agency for popular and jazz musicians beginning in 1924. Lew Wasserman, who rose through the ranks, grew MCA into an entertainment giant by forming EMKA, Limited, which bought out Paramount Pictures’ pre-1948 film library and, in 1962, Universal Pictures. Emboldened by these moves, Wasserman entered the record business in 1962 by buying out American Decca and its subsidiary labels, Brunswick and Coral. These labels became the MCA Music Group in 1973. In 1979, MCA acquired the ABC Dunhill group—mostly pop material, but also including much valuable jazz originally issued by Dot and Impulse! records.

But before we get too embroiled in the complex world of corporate music mergers, it is time to discuss music’s next great step forward, the introduction of digital sound.

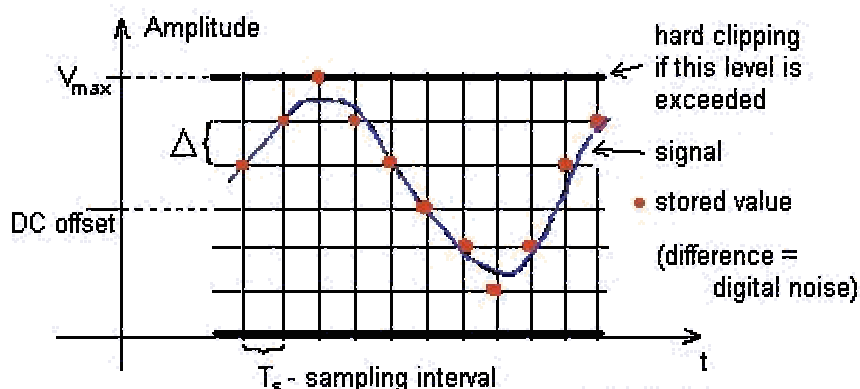
### *The digital revolution?*

Like so many technological “revolutions,” the digitalization of sound was years in the making. The process for digitally encoding sound by computer was first developed in 1957 by Max Mathews of Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill (Mathews, 1963). Other advances in digital electronics and microchips led to the development of the first digital Pulse Code Modulation (PCM) audio recorder in 1967 at the NHK Technical Research Institute in Japan (Nakajima, 1983). This machine used was a 12-bit companded scheme (using a compression/ expansion of sound to improve dynamic range) with a 30 kHz sampling rate. Data was recorded on a one-track, two-head helical scan VTR (Video Tape Recorder). The first commercial PCM/digital recording session was performed by Denon in 1972 (Takeaki, 1989). The first 16-bit digital recording in the US was made in 1976 at the Santa Fe Opera on a handmade Soundstream digital tape recorder developed by Dr. Thomas G. Stockham. Stockham’s smaller, more portable digital tape recorder was to become an important component of sound transference in the future.

In its simplest sense, “digital” means representing something in numerical form, while “analog” means a continuous physical quantity. To “digitize” means to convert that physical quantity into a numerical value. If, for instance, we represent the intensity of a sound by numbers proportionally related to the intensity, the analog value of the intensity has been represented digitally. The accuracy of the digital conversion depends upon the number of discrete numerical values that can be assigned and the rate at which these numerical measurements are made. For example, 4 numerical levels will represent changes in the amplitude of sound less accurately than 256 numerical levels and a rate of 8 conversion/sec will be less accurate than a rate of 10,000 conversions/sec.

The experiments of the early 1970s, then, were twofold: to record new selections by the digital process, and to convert older recordings made by the analog process to digital. Both were remarkably successful, and led to some quick decisions by a combined consortium of Sony and Polygram to create a new sound carrier for the digital signal. One reason why digital conversions worked as well as new digital recordings was that, during the digital recording process, a conversion of sorts takes place anyway. Analog to digital (A/D) conversion takes place from continuous time-amplitude coordinates to discrete time-amplitude coordinates as

illustrated in the figure below. The difference between the instantaneous analog signal and digital representation is digital error.



*Use of an A/D (or D/A) converter to convert a continuous function (time-amplitude) to a discrete function (discrete time - discrete amplitude). Conversion introduces a digital error in the signal - digital noise.*

Not too surprisingly, these various experiments, though completely successful technologically, met with stiff resistance from most record labels. None except the Polygram group were willing to sacrifice the LP, which was inexpensive to produce and had a ready-made



market, for a newfangled sound carrier that required an entirely new and different method of sound reproduction. They knew it would be a hard sell to a world that had been weaned on analog records they could play with a needle, so the first digital recordings were issued for approximately six years on analog LPs. The first commercial classical recordings made by the digital process in America was a series of organ recordings played by Virgil Fox in 1977. When they were first issued, quite tentatively, by the small Collectors' Edition label, they created a sensation and quickly sold out. It turned out that, even on an LP, listeners could appreciate the wider dynamic range, quieter background ambience and "purer" sound of digital recordings.

To understand why digital sound is so much "purer" than analog sound, one must have a basic knowledge of the physics of music. In its simplest terms, music reaches our ears not merely in terms of pitch, volume and duration, all of which were challenged, overcome and solved in the eighty years of the analog record, but also what physicists call "the envelope." This envelope is anything that creates the sound and causes it to resonate, whether a violin, clarinet, trumpet, bassoon, or human voice. Though the basic principles of sound production

are different in each, the problem of the “envelope” must be solved in each of their cases. Instruments with a tightly-controlled production of resonance, such as a violin, viola or clarinet, are relatively easy to capture on an analog recording; but instruments with a more diffuse method of sound production, such as bassoons, tympani, brass instruments or human voices, are more difficult to capture accurately via analog recording. It is generally not known, for instance, that only 2% of the sound produced by a trumpet-player actually escapes through the bell; the other 98% stays inside the instrument, and the 2% that does escape is not as “directional” as one might think. (One analog recording engineer who worked in classical music during the late 1960s and early ‘70s one said that the two hardest sounds to capture accurately were the sound of a trumpet and the highly diffuse voice of soprano Cristina Deutekom.) With a digital recording rate of 10,000 conversions per second, much more of that “envelope” could be, and was, recorded on the original source. Naturally, this wider range had little or no effect on electronic instruments used by rock musicians, which do not possess an “envelope.” Their sound is not produced naturally via an instrument or voice vibrating in space, but is a tightly-focused electronic sound which cuts through the aural spectrum like a hot knife through butter.

### *The first proponents of digital*

Perhaps surprisingly, the earliest classical proponents of digital sound were not members of the younger generation. These musicians were more than willing to let older, more established musicians make the switch, pass their judgment and influence the industry as a whole. One reason for this was the low opinion many classical music students had of recordings, an opinion not only passed along to them by their teachers—many of whom were older European musicians who had loved Furtwängler or Ginette Neveu in person but who were thoroughly disenchanted by their records—but also by the tape-splicing and forms of “sound manipulation” performed in the studio which led them to suspect that anything they heard on records was reality.

And so, in America, it was Virgil Fox who first took the plunge to make digital classical recordings. In Europe it was Herbert von Karajan, the sonic heir apparent to Stokowski and a much finer musician who, after hearing his first digital playback, declared, “Everything else is gaslight!” Fox, as we have seen, was always considered musically decadent because of his refusal to play Bach on period organs and his rock-inspired light shows of the early 1970s, but Karajan was highly respected in the musical community, and so his word went a long way towards convincing his peers to try the new medium.

Another conductor who took the plunge into digital recording was none other than Leopold Stokowski. Having since moved from America back to England in the early 1970s, Stokowski was still making records with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1976, at the age of 94, he signed a recording contract that would have kept him active until the age of 100, but he died the following year at age 95 after having only made one digital recording session. Needless to say, the old sound experimenter would have reveled in digital sound the same way he reveled in early stereo, high fidelity and London Phase 4 sound.

### *Understanding CDs: a true “space age” technology*

Unlike the various earlier forms of recording (cylinder, flat disc, 78, 45, LP), digital recording was far more scientific which, of course, means far more abstract. Everything was now done electronically, and specifications were set and maintained within the industry by



none other than Philips. Philips codified the format for CDs in a specifications manual called the red book for the color of its cover. The red book insists that an audio CD can carry the CD logo (shown here) only if it complies with these specifications, as follows (my thanks to Mike Richter, whose site is [www.mrichter.com](http://www.mrichter.com), for help in simplifying and understanding these technical specs):



1. A continuous stream of audio bits organized in a particular way with a Table of Contents indicating the start of each track in a specific fashion.
2. The audio stream used Pulse Code Modification (PCM), which is equivalent to a reordering of a digital sound file—often called a WAV or AIFF—minus any header or footer.
3. A sample rate of 44,1000 bits per second (kbps), which is sometimes, wrongly, written as 44.1 KHz.
4. Each sample must consist of two channels of audio.
5. Each channel has two eight-bit bytes per sample for 16 bits of encoding.
6. Subchannels are available for specialized purposes. These provide CD text and other capabilities more complex than is needed to explain here.

The rate of 44.1 kbps provides an audio signal beyond 22 kHz, which means beyond the range of ordinary playback equipment to reproduce or most users to hear as pure tones. In fact, there *is* an audible loss due to that sampling when real music is recorded, but that was a compromise reached back in the 1970s when the technology was developing. Higher sampling rates would have meant much more expensive equipment for relatively little return as well as shorter recording time. When DVD-video came along, 48 kbps was selected, but there is almost no practical difference between them. However, mastering and some audio sources justified still higher rates, which have led to standards such as 96 and 192 kbps.

In the very early years of the CD, the early 1980s, manufacturers worked overtime to restrict the playing time of a disc to 65 minutes. This was because the red book specifications allowed for a maximum length of 74 minutes with a tolerance of 63-80. It was discovered early on that recording quality was higher on a 63-minute blank, but the advantage of 74 became apparent in the marketplace. Nowadays, the 80-minute CD is the industry standard, especially for classical recordings. Though the sound on an 80-minute CD is inferior to a 74-minute CD, the marketplace demanded more value for the money.

Unlike an LP, which uses a relatively simple pressing process (put the blob of plastic in, clamp down the pressing master, and voila, a disc), pressing a CD is itself more complex. An audio CD, like all CDs, is basically a sandwich comprising several layers. First of these is a polycarbonate plastic substrate—the same kind of high-impact plastic used in football helmets and airplane windows—containing a shallow groove which plays, like the old transcription 78s, from the inside out towards the edge of the disc. Above the polycarbonate substrate is an organic dye recording layer of cyanine, phtalocyanine or azo followed by a thin metal reflective layer (gold, silver alloy or silver), and finally an outer protective lacquer coating. Some discs are also topped with additional layers that improve scratch-resistance, increase handling durability, or provide surfaces suitable for labeling by inkjet or thermal transfer printers.

Commercially-produced CDs have a deeper etched groove than those you can burn yourself at home (of which much more later), and the manufacturing process is much more

carefully controlled. Early in the CD era, there was an article in Stereo Review magazine showing employees in “clean suits” making CDs in a dust-free environment. Though some readers of the article (including yours truly) thought this was just a publicity gimmick meant to justify the much higher price of the CD—in those days, \$17 to \$20 compared to \$9 to \$11 for an LP—this was truth in reporting, and the manufacturing process has evolved little since. Though requiring a clean room, it is efficient. Injection molding creates the polycarbonate base, much like producing an LP, but the dye layer is applied using spin coating and the re-



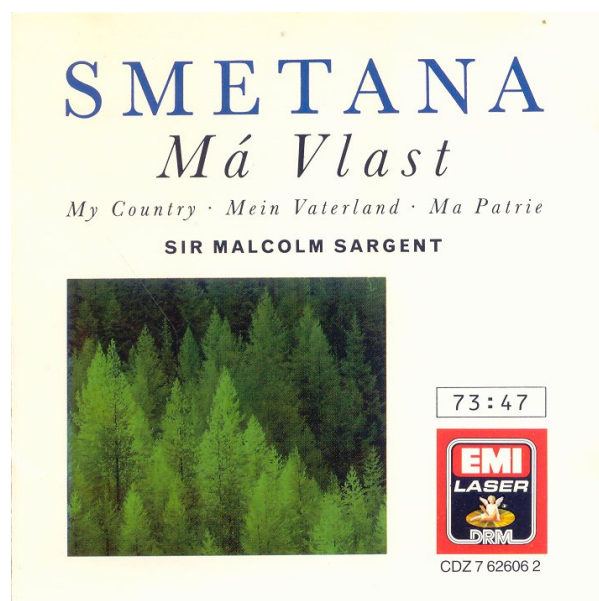
Sony's first CD player

reflective layer by means of something called “cold planar magnetic sputtering.” (Don’t ask me, I don’t make them, I just listen to them.) The lacquer overcoat is applied by another spin coating procedure, followed by ultraviolet curing. Additional durability or printable layers are usually applied using screen printing methods.

I can still recall the early “sound demonstrations” of CDs at my local record store, but since the playback equipment used was far from the best and commercial CDs stubbornly stayed with the 16-bit resolution, the sound I heard was far from impressive.

True, there was no surface noise, but the audio range as presented on cheap little speakers in a record store sounded no different to me than a good LP. For better or worse, many home listeners felt the same way. Most people, used to the sound of LPs, had only mediocre playback equipment at home, and thus couldn’t have heard the difference.

Moreover, it is hard to believe today that musicians—not just classical musicians, but rock musicians as well—railed against the “cold, clinical sound” of the CD compared to what they heard as “the warmer, richer sound” of an LP. In side-by-side sound tests, however, it was discovered that what they heard as the “warmth” and “richness” of an LP was actually the sound of the vinyl itself, gently, quietly yet audibly rubbing itself against the stylus. It turned out that part of what they missed hearing was not (to paraphrase Paul Simon) the sound of sil-



Left: An earlier CD, from the end of the 65-minute length era, with a playing time of only 60:43.

Right: One of the first 74-minute CDs, part of EMI's classic reissue program.

ence so much as the sound of plastic. Yet there was a certain clinical coldness to many early CDs and, like the difference in various brands of LPs, it differed from manufacturer to manufacturer. Philips, Decca and DGG CDs sounded the best (understandable since Philips wrote the specs and they were part of the Polygram group). Denon had the next-best sound, followed by RCA and Supraphon. EMI's sound was very clean, fairly realistic, yet somewhat clinical, recording location and natural ambience having an impact on the sound one heard. Ironically, poor CBS-Columbia—which had already suffered the most due to the poor-quality vinyl crisis—had absolutely the worst sound, thin and shrill, not only in their newly-recorded CDs but also (perhaps more so) in their analog-digital-remastering (abbreviated in the industry as ADRM).

It has been said that the record industry decided on a disc size of 4.75-inch diameter in order to fit a complete performance of the Beethoven Ninth Symphony, which averaged 65 minutes, on one continuous side of a disc. It was also decided early on to record on one side of the disc only. Some people think that this is because a CD *cannot* be recorded on two sides, but of course this is untrue. The manufacturers could always bond two polycarbonate discs back-to-back underneath the other layers. But that would allow absolutely no room for the record label since the inside diameter of the unused portion of a CD is only 1 3/8 inches across—far too small to put a label of any kind on—and the spindle hole is 1/2", larger than that of an LP but far smaller than that of a 45. Well, you know a record company isn't going to issue any record without a label, so of course they use side A for the label and side B for the record—so, in a way, we reverted to the early days of the 78 with their one-sided discs.

We've also reverted to the early days in another way. CDs spin at a tremendously high rate—178 rpm—in order for the digital information to be read by the laser. Since there is a laser involved, too, the disc had to disappear from sight, which meant that collectors were finally deprived the visual delight of watching a record spin as it was being played. Like so much in the digital process, much of what is really going on is out of sight.

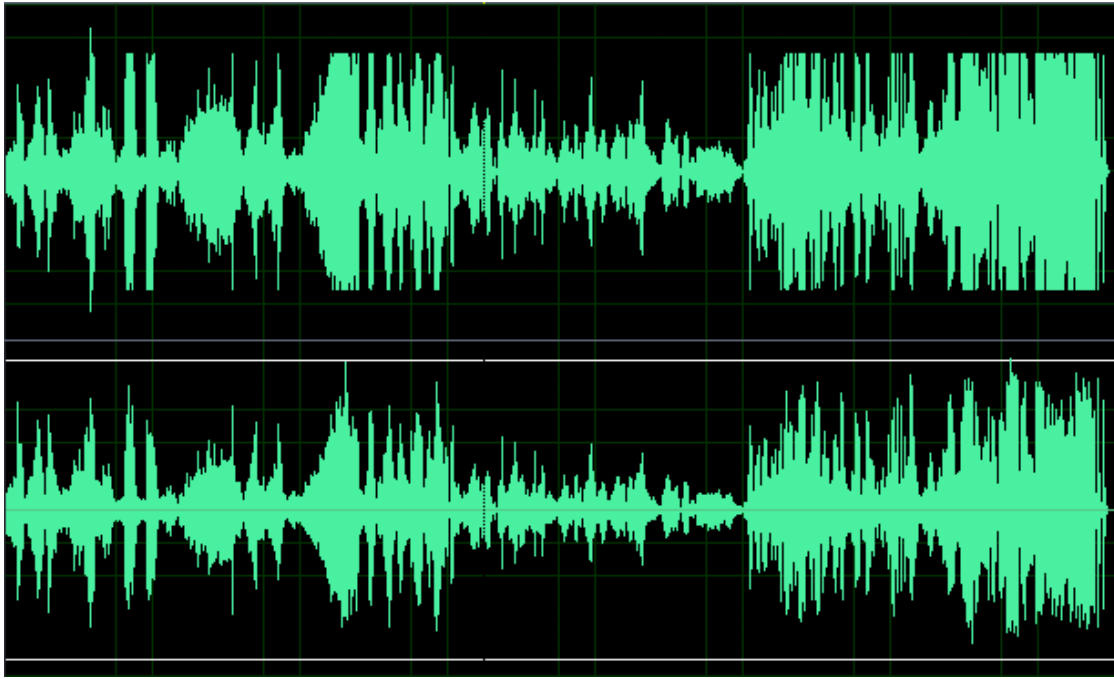
Industry insiders secretly wondered whether the new technology, with its more expensive cost and equally more expensive playback system, would completely replace the LP. After all, they were considering a sound carrier that had been around for 35 years, and which had taken five years to completely replace the extended-play 45 and fifteen years to replace the even more antiquated 78. They shouldn't have worried. LPs began disappearing less than four years after the first commercial CDs were issued in the early 1980s; by the time the CD was a decade old, LPs were being junked and replaced at such a rapid rate that manufacturers stopped making them altogether. There are now new generations of listeners who have never even seen an LP, any more than they have ever seen a typewriter. Once the LP and the 45 disappeared, they disappeared for good. Only a few "nostalgia" manufacturers even make them for novelty purposes any more.

### *Good CDs – Bad CDs*

In the brave new world of CDs, "perfect" sound was guaranteed by the major labels. But it was not very long before many of the CDs produced, particularly reissues, began to fall far short of the mark. The problem was in making shoddy transfers of the original analog recordings to digital, and EMI – one a proud standard-bearer of fine sound – was the principal culprit. Discs which should have made the old sound even better in fact made it worse.

For a technical description of the problems involved, I turn the floor over to Mike Richter, an opera-lover and sound technician of long standing. He is a pioneer in the field of transferring old analog recordings to digital; even in using 40-year-old LPs, some of which were

cheaply-made transfers from original 78s, he has performed miracles in cleaning up the sound without distorting the bandwidth or creating internal wow and flutter as some of his more highly-paid colleagues have done. The following is from his website at [www.mindspring.com/~mrichter/emiaudio/emiaudio.htm](http://www.mindspring.com/~mrichter/emiaudio/emiaudio.htm).



*The image above is a screen capture from Adobe Audition of one track of a French EMI set released in 2003. The source was monaural from 1958 and the result is a travesty of professional transfer. I note that there were nearly 100 monaural tracks on this ten-CD set. Some were better, some worse, but none was free of the sorts of problems illustrated here. Not visible in this view, there is also evidence that the two channels are slightly out of phase, making it likely that a phono cartridge was misaligned or a stereo play head with incorrect azimuth was used on the master tape. In either case, there would be a penalty to pay in high-frequency response; I had no way to assess that and no good way to correct for it.*

*Listening to this track, I was disturbed. There was audible distortion, unbalance between channels and a moving image. I pulled the LP from my library and, sure enough, it was undistorted, balanced and had a stable image. To try to determine what was wrong, I extracted the track into Adobe Audition and my fears were confirmed. In fact, I can see in my mind's eye what the engineer did. Seeing that first peak, the engineer was afraid that he'd get saturation, so he threw in a limiter on the left (upper) channel. Hey, who'd notice? Sure enough, the limiter was needed – those right-channel peaks would definitely have driven the left channel into saturation and hard clipping. Of course, he **could** have balanced channels at lower gain and remade the track, but that would have taken an extra minute or two. Regardless, he left the setup unchanged for the next track as well.*

*The stereo tracks also had unbalance and clipping, but nothing as clear as on the monaural ones – and nothing as readily corrected. I did take the effort to make what repairs were possible. For each monaural track, I selected the channel that was less bad, altered level as needed and reduced clipping. Of course, it would have been a*



*lot easier to work with undistorted input – the original signal source of tape or LP – and that would give far better results. But that was the engineer's job; the best I could do was reduce his damage and produce something that doesn't sound much worse than the LP.*

This kind of shoddy workmanship affected a great many European EMI reissues of the 1980s and early '90s. And even in the ones that were balanced well, the EMI engineers either cleaned up the background noise with limiters that affected the overall sound spectrum, making the full-bodied voices of singers like Maria Caniglia, Beniamino Gigli, Victoria de los Angeles, Jussi Björling and Leonard Warren, as well as the BBC Symphony and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras, sound pallid even in comparison with the LP originals. Collectors, disgusted with what they heard, junked the discs, warned others against them, and thus virtually shut down EMI's reissue program. This was a little-noticed but important factor in the sharp decline in EMI's reputation in the years they were owned by Thorn, who thought little of classical music and didn't much care about producing quality as long as they could move product.

### *The decline of folk music*

Once Bob Dylan went electric in 1967, it virtually signalled the end of folk music *per se* as a popular music. Following his revolution, only a few groups and performers—Peter, Paul and Mary, Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs and Odetta among them—still clung to acoustic folk performance. Of course, by then the concept of folk music had been degraded anyway, with popular lounge performers like Trini Lopez recording Lee Hays' "Hammer Song," and the urban sprawl which had begun to infect even remote areas by the early 1960s virtually eliminated regional folk music as it had existed in the days of the Lomax's field recordings. The media explosion of the 1960s and '70s worked against regional differences; even farm boys in rural areas were playing heavy metal and other forms of rock music, not anything resembling folk music which reflected their different lifestyle.

By the early 1980s, folk music had become a form of "nostalgia" music, much like jazz and early a capella rock music. The Weavers' last reunion in 1980 signaled the end of an era in which folk was a living, vibrant part of the American culture; and, as we have seen, as America went so went the world. It is safe to say that the folk influence on classical music, or any other kind of world music, virtually ended at that time. Since then, any form of indigenous music anywhere in the world has had to blend with rock music in order to be commercial, which has diminished its value as an independent musical source.

### *Jazz shrieks, curls up and dies*

As folk music went through some painful adjustment procedures, so too did jazz. By the late 1970s-early 1980s, jazz was divided into four discrete camps: the fusionists, with their heavy rock beat and droning electric guitars; "mellow jazz," which would soon become New Age music; the traditionalists, stubbornly playing an older style they had played years earlier or grown up with (be it Dixieland, swing, bop or cool); and the experimentalists, playing in the avant-garde. Among the latter were the Art Ensemble of Chicago, a holdover from the late 1960s; the World Saxophone Quartet, a group of four African-American players who interacted in a complete harmonic-melodic-rhythmic style without the use of any rhythm instruments; Arthur Blythe, an alto saxist who played with a churning rhythm section that skirted the division between jazz and funk; Chick Corea, a pianist who flirted with fusion but prefer-

red jazz with a subtle but definite Latin beat; and Toshiko Akiyoshi, the highly gifted Asian pianist-composer whose big band played a diverse array of music that included the older styles of swing and bop as well as imaginative soundscapes involving not only Asian but Middle Eastern rhythms, melodies and instruments. Akiyoshi was originally signed to RCA Victor, but the label failed to promote her in any significant way, and her records were not distributed particularly well. Blythe was signed to Columbia, which did promote him, but his music was too far outside the mainstream for it to catch on in any significant way.

Akiyoshi and her husband, tenor saxist and flutist Lew Tabackin, left RCA in 1978 and, taking a page from Charles Mingus, started their own label, Jazz America Marketing (JAM). Based in Washington, D.C., JAM did a much better job of distributing Akiyoshi's and Tabackin's records, among them the albums "Salted Ginkgo Nuts," "Farewell to Mingus" and "Tanuki's Night Out." After a few years, however, they had to abandon the label because so few units were being sold. Akiyoshi made a solo piano album for Concord Jazz, a California-based label largely known for its retro swing music. Eventually they formed yet another label, Ascent, which lasted even shorter than JAM. In 1991 Dr. George Butler, who had become an A&R director, signed both Akiyoshi and former World Saxophone Quartet member David Murray to Columbia Records, but their discs did as poorly there as they did for the independents.

The musician who, more than any other, came to dominate the jazz scene was a trumpeter from New Orleans named Wynton Marsalis. Originally a member of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, Marsalis hired a high-powered agent à la Pavarotti and promoted himself in both the classical *and* jazz fields. His classical playing was praised by the critics, even though in some concertos he eliminated or abridged difficult passages or cadenzas, and in the jazz field he managed to draw listeners back from the field of New Age and fusion. In a sense he was aided and abetted not only by his label, Columbia, but also by a critic, Stanley Crouch, who set himself up as the arbiter of all things jazz. According to Crouch, jazz was strictly and exclusively an expression of the African-American experience; any and all other ethnic groups that played it were simply emulating black culture, and not very successfully, or simply ripping them off. With Marsalis insisting that Crouch write the liner notes for most of his Columbia albums, the two of them created an insular and quite artificial jazz world in which only black music mattered, any development after Mingus was considered non-jazz, and Wynton Marsalis was the world's greatest exponent of jazz. This was the viewpoint espoused by filmmaker Ken Burns, with the eager and enthusiastic support and participation of Marsalis and Crouch, in his PBS series on jazz.

Both the short and long-term results of the Marsalis philosophy has been to splinter and alienate other jazz musicians. Considering that Marsalis' home town, New Orleans, is often considered the cradle of jazz as well as the place where various races met and mixed their musical cultures, this is particularly sad. Over the years, however, his philosophy has only come to dominate the music in New York City, where he runs the Jazz at Lincoln Center program. Elsewhere in the country, and the world, jazz is still played by a variety of musicians in a variety of styles—but without a marketing niche or anything resembling popularity, it has pretty much curled up and died.

Consider this: when Charles Mingus' last great orchestral score, "Epitaph," was given its world premiere—in New York, no less, in 1989—the only country that televised the performance was Norway. The participating musicians joked that they probably watched it while milking the elk, since it was broadcast "live" at about five a.m. Oslo time.

*New classical stars, no market*

At the very juncture in which technology and marketing were increasing by leaps and bounds, a number of great classical musicians and singers were appearing on the horizon. Among the best of them were sopranos Julia Varady, Ileana Cotrubas and Arleen Augér, disciples of Callas who believed firmly in opera as a dramatic as well as a musical art; cellist Lynn Harrell, the son of a wonderful baritone (Mack Harrell) who had never quite made it in the 1950s; soprano Jessye Norman, whose sumptuous voice and incisive musical style created a new standard in operatic performance; and conductors Klaus Tennstedt and Carlos Kleiber, whose very singular performances created a new standard in musical style. (Karajan considered Kleiber the greatest conductor in the world, even better than himself, but as he said to friends, “Kleiber only conducts when he wants to re-stock his freezer.”)

Their various record companies tried desperately to push these artists, but except for a few years when the public noticed Jessye Norman, none of them really caught on. All of them refused to compromise on their art, and none of them had a “marketing niche.” On the other hand, there were a few classical artists from that period who did manage to break through into superstardom, but only a few: sopranos Kiri te Kanawa and Kathleen Battle, flutist James Galway, and violinist Itzhak Perlman. Galway and Perlman succeeded by virtue of their effervescent personalities, te Kanawa and Battle in spite of their introversion. Te Kanawa genuinely detested publicity; after two decades in the spotlight, she retired from singing and called it a career. Battle was her own worst enemy, constantly fighting with conductors, directors, fellow-singers and audience members until her career self-destructed. Galway and Perlman, on the other hand, went on and on.

Undoubtedly, the primary reason why classical music failed to sell was that it had been devalued by the Hippie generation. Once their rock music was considered art, everything else took a back seat. And the media was only too happy to reinforce their position, since classical and jazz only sold to a small portion of the total record market while rock music sold to billions. The old philosophy that classical music had a positive moral effect on people may still have been true, but in a new hedonistic society that cared more for sex, sports and drugs, classical music provided a pretty poor soundtrack.

Eventually, classical music reached a point of exquisite irony. Performances were being recorded and issued that were classic in every sense, so much so that they often eclipsed any other that came before, but there were few to buy them, let alone care about them.

*More early music changes*

One of the most interesting and vibrant subcultures of the new trends in classical music was in the treatment of early music—the music of the Renaissance through the Baroque periods. These various styles of performance continued trends begun in the late 1960s, but with some new wrinkles.

One of those new wrinkles came from violinist Sigiswald Kuijken, who discovered a new way to hold the violin against his shoulder, as they did in the Baroque era, rather than under the chin, and yet play relaxed enough to produce a legato flow instead of the choppy, angular sound of other early-music violinists. His recording of J.S. Bach’s Partitas and Sonatas for unaccompanied violin, made for Harmonia Mundi in 1981, was one of the last great, innovative classical albums of the LP era; but typical of the lack of public interest in such music, no matter how magnificently performed, it was not mastered for or issued on CD until





1987. Since then, Kuijken has moved on to other labels, for which he has recorded the Bach Violin Concerti as well as symphonies of Haydn with his orchestra, La Petite Bande.

Another new wrinkle was the trend towards early music performance combining the strict rhythmic adherence of earlier British models with the more vibrant voices and rhythmic vitality of American and German models. Not surprisingly, the musicians who espoused this style came from all three countries and beyond, among them tenor-conductor Peter Schreier, whose controversial yet rhythmically vital recording of the Bach “Mass in b minor” turned heads; transplanted American William Christie, whose performances of Monteverdi,

Lully, Charpentier and Handel in Paris have made him a legend; British conductor John Eliot Gardiner, who rose to fame with an incendiary recording of the Bach “Magnificat” and Cantata No. 51 in 1983 launched a career that has gone on to many artistic pinnacles since; and Polish conductor Marc Minkowski, whose later performances of Handel and Gluck operas have virtually created a new standard in terms of the interaction of voices and orchestra. These musicians, in turn, have influenced an even younger generation, such as the pianist Miklós Spányi who specializes in the long-neglected music of C.P.E. Bach and such early-music orchestras as Concerto Armonico (dir. Péter Szűts), the Akademie für Alte Musik (concertmaster Stefan Mai), Europa Galante (cond. Fabio Biondi) who has revolutionized the concept of Vivaldi operas, and the C.P.E. Bach Kammerorchester (cond. Harmut Häschen), which has done outstanding work in researching and performing the music of the greatest of Bach’s sons.

As in the case of so much else in the classical world, however, the sad fact is that so few care and, because of the consolidation and absorption of record labels by corporate giants who care nothing at all for art, it is all being swept aside into a marginal area inhabited only by the precious few who still value this kind of music.



### *The Big Sellout: giant mega-corporations gobble up big mega-corporations*

From the 1980s onward, the onslaught of mega-corporations on the music world has been relentless, ever-increasing, and completely insensitive to art music. As the old comedians used to joke, “Profit is our most important product,” and attention to the bottom line at the expense of culture has led to an even more rapid decline in art music than ever before.

I will not go into this particular phase of operations in too much detail because it has



already been covered well by Norman Lebrecht in his book, *Who Killed Classical Music?* (Birch Lane Press, 1997). Yet a certain blow-by-blow description of what exactly happened may keep our heads from spinning too far or too fast. The first such buyout/merger occurred when Thorn, a British electronics firm, bought out EMI in the late 1970s, but things only got worse from there.

### Columbia into Sony

In 1980, Columbia Masterworks was renamed CBS Masterworks. Seven years later, Sony Corporation acquired the company. Norio Ohga, the Sony Corporation president, was committed to classical music as an essential component of Sony Music Entertainment. The company became a powerful international presence, being renamed Sony Classical in 1990. In the late 80s and early 90s, Sony Classical sought to complement the traditional symphonic, chamber and solo repertoire of the main Sony Classical catalogue. Vivarte—a label dedicated to authentic performances of medieval, renaissance and baroque music—was created under the direction of veteran early music producer Wolf Erichson. Erichson produced more than 100 recordings, and Vivarte became one of the most successful authentic performance labels on the market.

A priority of Sony Classical was to make virtually the entire CBS Masterworks catalog available on compact disc. Through the Essential Classics series, which sold more than 7 million units worldwide, many treasures of the catalog were presented on CD for the first time. In addition, major retrospective editions have been devoted to such distinguished musicians as Bruno Walter, Vladimir Horowitz, Pablo Casals, Glenn Gould, Leonard Bernstein and Pierre Boulez. In the fall of 1996, Sony Classical launched its award-winning Masterworks Heritage reissue line of historic digitally remastered recordings ranging from the 1903 Grand Opera series to the 1969 recording of the antiphonal music of Gabrieli.

In March 1995 Peter Gelb, the Emmy Award-winning producer of films featuring renowned musicians such as Horowitz, Rostropovich, Kathleen Battle and Wynton Marsalis, was named President of Sony Classical worldwide. From the label's international headquarters in New York, Gelb oversaw an artist roster that included Marcelo Álvarez, Emanuel Ax, Yuri Bashmet, Kathleen Battle, Joshua Bell, Terence Blanchard, Yefim Bronfman, Richard Danielpour, Plácido Domingo, Jane Eaglen, Susan Graham, Hilary Hahn, The Juilliard String Quartet, Evgeny Kissin, Yo-Yo Ma, Wynton Marsalis, Zubin Mehta, Midori, Mark O'Connor, Andrew Parrott, Murray Perahia, Itzhak Perlman, Marcus Roberts, Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Tan Dun, Arcadi Volodos and both conductor-composer John Williams and John Williams, guitarist. Only a few of them, particularly Battle, Marsalis, Perlman, Mehta, Ma and Domingo (all of whom had been major names beforehand) sold well. The others, particularly Bronfman who was a superb pianist but had no marketing appeal, and Susan Graham, a stunningly beautiful woman with a gorgeous mezzo-soprano voice, did well within the classical community but not so well outside of it.

### RCA into BMG

In the 1980s, RCA Victor sold its entire classical record catalog to the Bertelsmann Music Group or BMG. Like Sony, BMG was committed to classical music for a long while. They merged with Deutsche Harmonia Mundi and produced a string of reissues old and new, among them the complete Toscanini Edition in the late 1980s. Unfortunately, the Toscanini Edition, which also included videotapes of all of his televised performances, did not sell as well as expected. This massive expenditure in the reissue of one artist's recordings was, however, followed by complete reissues of the recordings of Enrico Caruso, Jascha Heifetz, Vlad-

imir Horowitz, Arthur Rubinstein and William Kapell, as well as an extensive box set of Charles Munch's Berlioz recordings. None of these projects did as well as expected. The Caruso set, which did more business than the others, ran into an unexpected problem. In an attempt to make the CDs more attractive, BMG sought to reproduce the general design of the old 78 Victrola label, but the dark red dye they used to make the label seeped through the plastic coating to the substrate on which the music was encoded. This created a "film" coating on the CDs which could be washed off with a mild detergent (like dishwashing detergent) and lukewarm water, but most people did not know this, and the red dye ruined the discs. BMG offered a massive exchange program whereby the affected discs could be exchanged for CDs on which the Victrola design was printed in plain black ink on a typical silver background. The expenditure of this massive exchange program proved to be a financial albatross for the company. Then, in 1998, the company discovered that 24-bit digital remastering of the Toscanini recordings created a much more lifelike sound than their 1988-1990 series. They created and marketed twelve double-CDs of Toscanini performances, and promoted them heavily, but buyers felt cheated. Those who had already spent a lot of money acquiring the earlier series were loath to replace those recordings, despite the better sound. Thus the new "Immortal Arturo Toscanini" edition failed in the record stores, and BMG was left with another fairly expensive project on their hands.

#### PPI, GPG, PolyGram and Universal

Perhaps no label conversion, reorganization, conglomeration and corporization is as confused or convoluted as that of the Universal Music Group, once no more or less than little old Philips Records of the Netherlands. We have already traced briefly the history of Polygram; here is the rest of the story, at least as far as I can make it out.

Before beginning this saga, I would like to emphasize that even the non-arts music information given below is of paramount importance, if not necessarily interest, to the arts music collector. One must know where the money is going, and coming from, in order to understand why arts music is on the decline.

#### Philips into PPI

In the 1940s, the record business was spread out within Philips — research in the Eindhoven labs, development elsewhere in Eindhoven, recording in Hilversum, manufacturing in Doetinchem, distribution from Amsterdam and exports from Eindhoven. During the late 1940s, Philips combined its various music businesses into Philips Phonografische Industrie (PPI), a wholly-owned subsidiary.

PPI's early growth was based on alliances. A merger was first proposed with Decca of London in late 1945, but was rejected by Edward Lewis, Decca's owner. (PolyGram finally acquired Decca in 1979.) In the early 1950s, Philips set itself the goal of making PPI the largest record company in Europe.

PPI's second attempt at a merger was with Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft (DGG). DGG, owned by Siemens AG and well-known for its classical repertoire, had been the German licensee for Decca from 1935. Shortly after PPI was founded it had made a formal alliance with DGG to manufacture each others' records, coordinate releases and not to poach each others' artists or bid against each other for new talent. PPI and DGG finally merged in 1962.

The alliance with DGG still left PPI without repertoire in Britain or the US. But in 1951, after Columbia had failed to renew its international distribution agreement with EMI, PPI agreed to distribute Columbia recordings outside the US and have Columbia distribute its recordings inside the US. This agreement ran until 1961, when Columbia set up its own Euro-

pean network and PPI set out to make acquisitions in the US. PPI built or bought factories in smaller countries. In 1962, PPI had a large factory in Baarn and factories in France, Britain, Denmark, Norway, Spain, Italy, Egypt, Nigeria and Brazil.

PPI played an important role in the introduction of the long-playing vinyl record to Europe. Columbia introduced their LP record in 1948 and Philips presented its first LP at a record retailers' convention in 1949. Philips' commitment to LP technology was an important factor in its 1951-1961 deal with Columbia.

### *GPG and PolyGram, 1962-1980*

In 1962, PPI and DGG formed the Gramophon-Philips Group (GPG), with Philips taking a 50% share in DGG and Siemens a 50% share in PPI. In 1972 the companies formally merged to form PolyGram, of which Philips and Siemens each owned 50%. In 1977 both organizations merged operationally, integrating the recording, manufacturing, distribution and marketing into a single organisation. The various record labels within PolyGram continued to operate separately. PolyGram gave its labels, as A&R organisations, great autonomy.

GPG needed to move into the US and UK markets, and did so by a process of acquisition: Mercury (US) in 1962, RSO (UK) in 1967, MGM Records and Verve (US) in 1972, Casablanca (US) in 1977 and Decca (UK) in 1980. PolyGram acquired United Distribution Corporation (UDC) in 1973 and signed distribution deals with MCA and 20th Century Records in 1976.

In the late 1960s and through the 1970s, GPG/PolyGram diversified into film and television production and home video. RSO's successes included "Saturday Night Fever" and "Grease." PolyGram's highly successful marketing during the disco craze included the Casablanca film *Thank God It's Friday* and its associated soundtrack. During the boom in disco, PolyGram's US market share had gone from 5% to 20%. For a short while, it was the world's largest record company.

### *Reorganization, 1980-1998*

However, a crisis was looming. Before 1978, with the acquisition of UDC, the distribution organisation was too large and PolyGram was making losses. When US operations were running at full capacity, PolyGram expanded aggressively, and would press large quantities of records without knowing the demand. In late 1979, the disco boom busted, leaving the company not only with an underutilised distribution network but with overoptimistic product orders and profligate labels. For example, Casablanca was notable for management spending on luxury cars and cocaine. From 1980 onwards, PolyGram was running up tremendous losses. Legal documents put the company's total losses at not less than US \$220 million.

In 1983, Philips manager Jan Timmer was appointed CEO. He cut the workforce from 13,000 to 7,000, reduced PolyGram's LP and cassette plants from eighteen to five and decreased the company's dependence on superstars by spreading the repertoire across different genres and nurturing national and regional talent. By 1985, PolyGram was profitable once more. After an attempted 1983 merger with Warner Music failed, Philips bought 40% of PolyGram from Siemens, and in 1987 the remaining 10%.

The compact disc, invented by Philips and Sony, helped greatly in boosting the company's sales and market share. PolyGram's strength in classical music helped greatly, as many of the CD's early adopters were classical music lovers. Total US sales of CDs were 1 million in 1983, 334 million in 1990 and 943 million in 2000. Total UK sales were 300,000 in 1983,

51 million in 1990 and 202 million in 2000. The CD increased PolyGram's profit margin from 4-6% in the mid-1980s to 7-9% by the early 1990s. As well, videos were distributed by PolyGram Video.

In 1989, Philips floated 16% of PolyGram on the Amsterdam stock exchange, valuing the whole company at \$5.6 billion. PolyGram embarked on a new program of acquisitions, including A&M and Island Records in 1989, Motown in 1993, Def Jam in 1994 and Rodven (Venezuela) in 1995.

In 1998, Philips sold PolyGram to Seagram and it was merged into Universal Music Group (UMG), formerly MCA Music Entertainment (see Music Corporation of America), the largest major label in the record industry. With a 25.5% market share, it is one of the Big Four record labels. It is owned by French media conglomerate Vivendi Universal. They have some of the world's biggest artists including Bon Jovi, Aerosmith, Mariah Carey, Eminem, Luciano Pavarotti, Rammstein, U2, Kanye West, and 50 Cent. It also owns one of the largest music publishing businesses of the world, the Universal Music Publishing Group.

"Universal Music" was originally the music company attached to film studio Universal Pictures; its history is long and complex, but the present organisation was formed when its parent company Seagram purchased PolyGram and merged it with UMG in 1998. Seagram has since merged with Vivendi SA, to form Vivendi Universal.

#### *The MCA-UMG Connection*

The Music Corporation of America, legally incorporated as MCA, Inc., was a United States-based corporation in the music business. The successor company is Universal Music Group. MCA published music, booked music acts, and ran a record label. MCA was founded as a music booking agency based in Chicago, Illinois in 1924 by Jules Stein. MCA helped pioneer modern practices of touring bands and name acts. Prominent early MCA booked artists included King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton.

Lew Wasserman rose through the ranks and went on to head MCA for more than four decades. During his tenure, he expanded the company's presence into television (founding EMKA, Ltd., which owns Paramount Pictures' pre-1948 film library and Revue Studios, the top supplier of television for all broadcast networks, spanning three decades). Wasserman also expanded MCA by purchasing Universal Studios in 1962 (he owned the backlot toward the end of the 1950s; Universal was in dire straits at that point). Wasserman turned Universal around and made it into the top film studio, producing hit after hit, and strengthening its presence in music.

Other notable executives within the company were Sidney Sheinberg, President of MCA, and Ned Tanen, former head of Universal Pictures. Tanen was behind Universal hits such as "Animal House" and John Hughes' "Sixteen Candles" and "The Breakfast Club."

MCA entered the record music business in 1962 with the purchase of the US Decca branch, including Coral Records and Brunswick Records. These labels were folded into MCA Records in 1973. In 1975, the company entered the book publishing business with the acquisition of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

In 1979 it acquired ABC Dunhill Records, along with its subsidiaries ABC Records, Paramount Records, Impulse Records, Dot Records and Dunhill Records. Chess Records was acquired in 1985, Motown Records was bought in 1988 (and sold to Polygram in 1993). GRP Records and Geffen Records were acquired in 1990. In the same year, the *MCA Corporation* holding company was purchased by the Matsushita group.



In 1995, Seagram Company Ltd. acquired 80% of MCA INC. and the following year the new owners dropped the MCA name; the company became Universal Studios, Inc. and its music division, MCA Music Entertainment Group, was renamed Universal Music Group. The following year the new owners sold G. P. Putnam's Sons to the Penguin Group. In 1998 Seagram acquired PolyGram from Philips and merged it with its music holdings. When Seagram's drinks business was brought by France-based Pernod Ricard, its media holdings (including Universal) were sold to Vivendi SA which became Vivendi Universal.

In the spring of 2003, MCA Records was folded into Geffen Records. Its country music label, MCA Nashville Records is still in operation.

MCA ran "RadioMOI," the Music On Internet company.

#### UMG runs everything – from Paris

UMG owns, or has a joint share in, a large number of record labels. In the following tree, I have put those labels that deal at least in part in art music in italics so as to indicate how little a portion of the total market share it now holds.

- Barclay Records
- Blackground Records
- Cinepoly
- *Deutsche Grammophon*
- DreamWorks Records
  - Show Dog Records
- Go East Entertainment
- Hollywood Records (Owned by The Walt Disney Company, distributed by Universal in the United States, Canada, Mexico and the rest of Latin America only)
- Interscope Geffen A&M Records
  - A&M Records
  - Geffen Records
  - Interscope Records
    - Aftermath Entertainment
    - G-Unit Records
    - MySpace Records
    - Shady Records
    - Vagrant Records
- The Island Def Jam Music Group
  - Dame Dash Music Group
  - Def Jam Records
  - Def Soul Records
  - Disturbing tha Peace Records
  - The Inc. Records
  - Island Records
  - Lost Highway Records
  - Roadrunner Records
  - Roc-A-Fella Records
  - Russell Simmons Music Group
- *Jazzland Records*
- MCA Nashville Records
- Mercury Nashville Records

- Mercury Records
- Motor Music Records
- Nhi Le Records
- Polar Music
- Polydor
- *Philips Records*
- RMM Records
- Stockholm Records
- *Universal Classics Group*
  - *Decca Records (Its classics holdings only.)*
- Universal Motown Records Group
- Universal Music Group Nashville
- Universal Music TV
- Universal Records
- Universal South Records
- Motown Records
- Republic Records
- Cash Money Records
- Casablanca Records
- Street Records Corporation
- Urban Records
- *Verve Music Group*
  - *Verve Records*
  - *GRP Records*
  - *EmArcy Records*
  - *Impulse! Records*
  - *Commodore Records*
  - Coral Records
  - Blue Thumb Records
  - Brunswick Records
  - *Decca Records (Its jazz holdings only.)*
  - Verve Forecast

Universal Music Group also owns local “Universal” labels in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Ireland (which apparently licenses all Universal content available to Yahoo! Music UK & Ireland), Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey.

### *The Sony-BMG Merger fiasco*

In the 1990s, Sony merged with Bertelsmann (BMG) on a proposed 50-50 split. The new conglomerate installed Andrew “Andy” Lack as its new president/CEO. When *Hollywood Reporter* writer Tamara Conniff interviewed Lack in February 2004, she indicated their fortress-like mindset:

*Question:* Do you expect the music business to go back up this year?

*Lack:* I think the business may stabilize somewhat. I don't believe it's going back up. It's wildly optimistic to say that it's going back up. I think the growth in this business is under siege. I think the losses have been stemmed. (The major labels) are trying to restructure their companies so that financially, they can stem the bleeding. I believe that the industry has done a good job in trying to stop the bleeding. But it's a much longer road to travel before you can say this industry is really growing and that we have, as an industry, a business model that makes this an attractive business to be in.

Even before the merger, Andy Lack saw the music industry as a struggle between *Us* (Music, Inc.) and *Them* (you). Admirably, Lack saw himself clearly: "I was never, ever thought to be credible as a businessman...I am the inmate put in charge of the asylum."

Credible businessman or not, Lack refused to allow his shortcomings to stop him. "I said, 'I won't put us into a merger where we don't maintain control.'" Therefore, as the Inmate In-Charge proudly told the *Financial Times*, he swept aside the experts to forge the Sony BMG venture:

There were no advisory teams that went out and said, well, after investigating and discussing and contemplating and we've issued reports and sent them back to the home office and now they're going to digest and consider and they told us that beginning of the first quarter of next year they will...There was no bureaucracy in the process.

"So what do we have?" Conniff asked, then answered. "An Inmate with a siege mentality calling all the shots while avoiding the very advisors who may have saved him from some really dumb mistakes. But that describes lots of execs. What drove Andy to allow his company to attack its own customers with rootkits? Perhaps the relentless attacks from... *pirates*." Rafat Ali paraphrases his musings for *BillboardPostPlay* readers:

Piracy is an idiotic word for what's happening...it is stealing. This is about criminals and thieves in the night...

I've had to fire thousands of people in the last few years [due to piracy issues]...it has been misery for me. These are people without jobs, without life...Until we figure out a way to protect content, there is no growth, and no business model. Piracy, it can't be said enough, has been devastating for us. Until we protect content -- and that will not happen in any significant way for the next 2-3 years -- we cannot go to the bank with the business model.

The 'miserable tsunami' [of piracy] is going to hit the TV and studios this year...

And just before the tsunami crested, our embattled philosopher-king-inmate gushed to *USA Today's* David Lieberman, "I bring a journalist's mind to the table -- the ability to ask a question and not have an answer." To which, Conniff could only ask, "Ever?"

She continues: "Perhaps if Andy Lack had been more businessman and less journalist, he would have avoided a 50/50 split (see any decent Biz 101 text, page one). He may also have had more respect for his customers and the Law...and, in the process, he may have spared Sony BMG's dismemberment.

"But that was not to be."

*Background:*

- *A tip on mergers from Andy Lack, Sony BMG; Financial Times via Trevor Cook.*
- *Bertelsmann changes tack on Sony BMG; Arndt Ohler and Andrew Edgcliffe-Johnson; Financial Times.*
- *Bertelsmann wants Sony-BMG CEO fired over pricey Springsteen contract; AFX News via Forbes.*
- *Bring Me The Head Of Andy Lack; Bob Lefsetz; The Lefsetz Letter.*
- *Chief Executive Officer: Andrew Lack; Sony BMG.*
- *Dialogue with Sony Music's Lack; Tamara Conniff; Hollywood Reporter.*
- *Lack is determined to be more than a music man; David Lieberman; USA Today.*
- *Sony BMG Coverage; Paul Resnikoff; Digital Music News.*
- *Sony BMG Music Agrees to \$10 Million Payola Settlement; BillboardPostPlay.*
- *Sony reconsiders policy on hiring 'reformed' hackers; John Murrell; Good Morning Silicon Valley.*
- *Sony, BMG Merge into One Grotesque Abomination, Hideous mutant creature begs for death after painful transformation; Nick Patch, Pitchfork Media.*
- *Sony's Andrew Lack, At His Bluest Ever; Rafat Ali; BillboardPostPlay.*
- *Sony's captain has Lack's back; Michael Learmonth; Variety.*
- *Sony's Stringer Defends Music Boss Lack; Peter Kafka; Forbes.*
- *The Divide Widens at Sony BMG; MacKenzie Reichert; Billboard via Entertainment Management Online.*

*Norio Ohga's dream*

Norio Ohga, son of a wealthy Japanese family, originally began studying music in 1948. He was studying singing and conducting when family friends recommended that he investigate jobs for a company that was trying to raise seed money for a new kind of tape recorder. This was how Ohga became involved with the newly-formed Sony company, a company that he would help build into a multi-billion-dollar, multi-national conglomerate that was a pioneer and world leader in audio and video equipment.

To make a very long story very short, Sony president Akio Morita liked Ohga and hired him as an "idea" man. Ohga soon discovered that he had a knack for business, enjoyed both designing and selling technical equipment, and soon had to make the hard decision to relegate his performing activities to the status of a hobby. Being a musician, he embraced the concept of music carriers as an especially important teaching tool as well as a way to disseminate music to the masses. Like Karajan, he was an odd mixture of elitist and populist who wanted everyone to share his enthusiasm for art music; therefore it was only natural that he and Karajan, when they met, would become lifelong friends. It was Ohga, for instance, who convinced Philips to standardize one single format for music cassettes, which the Dutch firm agreed to readily because they saw no market in it: to them, the cassette recorder was primarily a dictation device for business. Ohga and Sony quickly dominated the music cassette market, which tripled in size once Dolby noise reduction was introduced. Thanks more to Sony than Philips, everyone now had the means to record music, live and on records, onto portable, inexpensive carriers. Within a few years, live performance venues banned portable recording devices from the concert halls. The agents and promoters didn't want people getting a permanent record of their cherished, high-priced artists for free. But of course, since



portable cassette recorders were relatively small (and Sony made them even smaller as time went on), it was not difficult to slip them into a ladies' purse, even a small, hand-held purse. No one suspected or knew how many concerts were recorded "live" over the years by portable Sony tape recorders. Some of them have since come out on CDs, preserving for all time the living legends of the opera houses and philharmonics in more exciting, less inhibited performances.

But Ohga scarcely stopped at the music cassette. In the 1970s, his firm developed the first video cassette recorders—initially clumsy and expensive, eventually smaller and more user-friendly. One of Sony's greatest and best-kept secrets was their experiments in recording and reproducing music with laser beams, thus eliminating any mechanical interference between performer and home listening. Naturally, Karajan was excited beyond his wildest dreams by this promise of near-perfect reproduction, and so begged Sony to send him even a prototype machine so he could start re-recording his entire repertoire. When Ohga informed him that Sony was still some years away from a practical realization, since most of the major advances in this field had been made by Philips who was still smarting from Sony's usurpation of the audio cassette, Karajan used his vast influence to force the Dutch to negotiate with the Japanese firm.

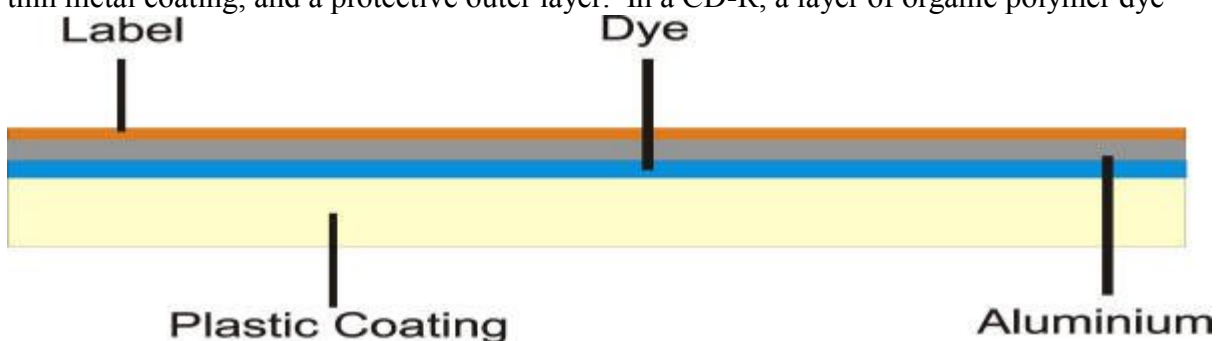
When consumers became familiar with the sound of CDs, it was Sony who again upped the ante with the development of "20-bit sound." In the processing of digital recordings for commercial release, it was decided early on that only 16 bits per 100 would be used so as to not overload home speakers that, even at this late stage, were not prepared to handle the onslaught of the full digital spectrum. If you think of digital sound reproduction as being like a window screen, you will have some visual picture of what this means: allowing the sound to trickle through 16 little holes in the screen out of 100. By increasing this ratio from 16 to 20, Sony made the sound less cramped. In time, they would raise the ratio to 22, then 24-bit, and each advance led to a fuller, warmer, more realistic sound than the one before.

Ohga and Karajan planned together to create a record label in the conductor's image. Sony Classical was to debut in 1990 with Karajan as its major classical artist, but the 80-year-old conductor suddenly died in July 1989—with Ohga, ironically enough, at his bedside talking to him. Ohga was devastated, and by the time Sony Classical was launched they only managed to sign the Berlin Philharmonic under its new music director, Claudio Abbado, to a part-time contract, Abbado having meanwhile signed a long-term renewal with Karajan's principal label, DGG.

Undeterred, Ohga launched Sony Classical anyway. As insurance, he signed up two other famous Italian conductors, Carlo Maria Giulini and Riccardo Muti, to long-term deals. Though none of the three conductors had exclusive contracts with Sony, Muti recorded more of his output for the label than the other two; and, after some of his many opera recordings for EMI failed to sell, the British firm virtually abandoned him to Sony. Muti's opera recordings, which became increasingly more expensive to produce, generally featured "no-name" casts (though some of his singers, particularly tenor Roberto Alagna, became stars) and brisk, taut conducting shorn of all high notes not in the score. In a way, then, Muti's approach was similar to Toscanini's, but many of his performances peculiarly lacked tension. Because of this, they sat on the shelves unsold, which cost both EMI and Sony untold millions of dollars. Yet there was one Muti opera recording that caught fire, his Sony production of Gluck's *Iphigenie en Tauride* with the incendiary soprano Carol Vaness and Swedish tenor Gösta Winbergh in top form. This recording resounded through the music world, creating an interest in reviving other Gluck operas, both in the theater and on disc.

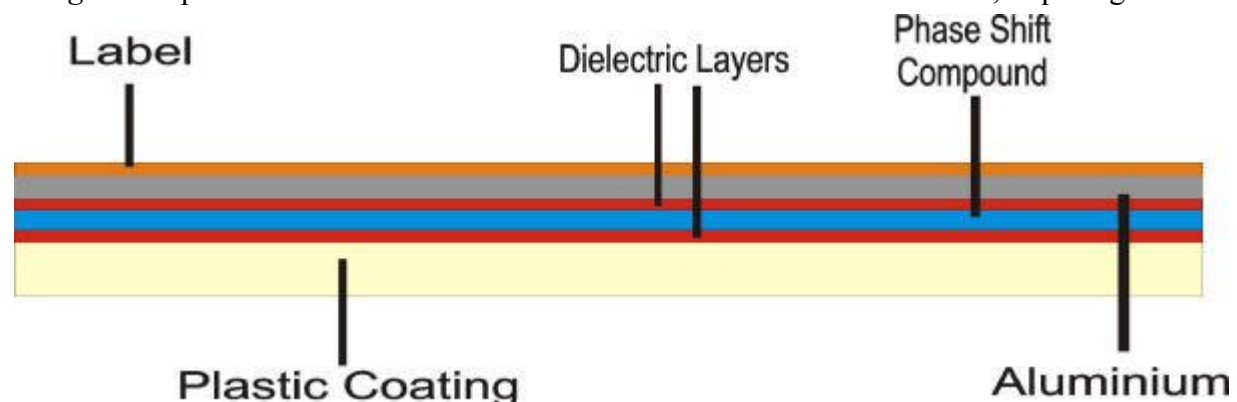
Sony had already launched the Walkman, a portable CD player with headphones that listeners could use for very personal listening, at home or in public, which caught on like wildfire. In the early 1990s the company launched two other devices which caught the attention of techno-freaks: the video laser disc and digital audio tape (DAT). DAT was a great concept, a shell-encased tape not much bigger than a conventional cassette. Though the first player-recorders were pricey, consumers knew from experience with audio CDs that the price would come down as more of them appeared on the market. The problem was, it was *too* great of a concept. Music promoters, already annoyed that people could record music in analog fashion on the older cassettes, brought lawsuits against Sony that killed DAT. Undeterred, Ohga moved ahead with programs and hardware that could copy audio files from old LP records, tapes or other CDs and “burn” them on blank CDs that one could buy inexpensively in most record or office supply stores. The two different kinds of blank CDs were identified as CD-RW (for data) and CD-R (for music).

Like all CDs, the CD-Rs and CD-RWs are composed of a polycarbonate substrate, a thin metal coating, and a protective outer layer. In a CD-R, a layer of organic polymer dye



between the polycarbonate and metal layers serves as the recording medium. The dye composition is permanently transformed by exposure to a specific frequency of light. Some CD-Rs have an additional protective layer to make them less vulnerable to damage from scratches, since the data – unlike that on a regular CD – is closer to the label side of the disc. A pre-grooved spiral track helps guide the laser for recording data, which is encoded from the inside to the outside of the disc in a single continuous spiral. The laser creates marks in the dye layer that mimic the reflective properties of the *pits* and *lands* (lower and higher areas) of the traditional CD. The distinct differences in the way the areas reflect light register as digital data that is then unencoded for playback. The composition of the dye is permanently transformed by exposure to the laser.

In a CD-RW, the dye is replaced by an alloy that can change back and forth from a crystalline form when exposed to a particular light, through a technology called *optical phase change*. The patterns created are less distinct than those of other CD formats, requiring a



more sensitive playback device. Only drives designated as “MultiRead” are able to read CD-RWs reliably. Like a CD-R, the CD-RW’s polycarbonate substrate is preformed with a spiral groove to guide the laser. The alloy phase-change recording layer, commonly a mix of silver, indium, antimony and tellurium, is sandwiched between two dielectric layers that draw excess heat from the recording layer. After heating to one particular temperature, the alloy becomes crystalline when cooled; after heating to a higher temperature, it will become amorphous (won’t hold its shape) when cooled. By controlling the temperature of the laser, crystalline areas and non-crystalline areas are formed. The crystalline areas reflects the laser while the other areas absorb it. The differences register as binary data that can be unencoded for playback. To erase or write over recorded data, the higher temperature laser is used, which results in the non-crystalline form, which can then be reformed by the lower temperature laser.

Taiyo Yuden invented the CD-R, along with Philips and Sony, on June 13th, 1988. At the time, Taiyo Yuden was the only manufacturer of CD-R media in the world, supplying media to many well-known CD-R distributors. The first CD recorders were also made available in 1988, but were not an option for the average home recorder because, with the requisite hardware and software, they cost upwards of \$100,000. At a weight of 600 pounds, the Meridian Data CD Professional was the first CD recorder. The CD-R was not given the boost it needed until 1992 when Sony’s CD-ROM drives were introduced into the computer market. At that point, the CD-R market changed from mainly audio applications to data, which because of its quick market expansion gave the CD-R notoriety and market success. But of course, it also led to the eventual downloading of music from the Internet which has been the source of so much angst for record manufacturers worldwide.



Ironically, then, the antagonistic reaction of the music conglomerates to the DAT opened the doors for an even more reliable, easy-to-store and less delicate format. DATs, like all tapes, required one to turn the tape over to play the other side and, like analog cassette tapes, tended to stretch and/or break over time. CD-Rs, like commercial CDs themselves, were and are virtually indestructible, though since the playing surface is less cushioned or protected than commercial CDs it must be handled with a little more care. Today’s CD recorders typically weigh a few pounds and can be bought for less than \$300, an inexpensive toy for the wealthy but even affordable for the poorer consumer.

Whereas the CD burner caught on and developed quickly, the video laser disc developed more slowly. The problem was that, like the first CD burners, the technology was bulky and expensive. The first laser discs were twelve inches in diameter, the same as the old LP records, they retailed for \$35 to \$40 apiece, and could only be played on Sony laser disc players which cost around \$1,000. Many consumers simply bided their time and waited for the price to come down. It did, a little, but never enough to make the idea feasible until a decade later when even more modern technology was able to compress the data on a disc to the size of a music CD. Then the concept took off, as “DVDs,” and Hollywood got indigestion worrying about how consumers could copy their own movies at home as easily as they did music.

As for arts music on DVD, it consists primarily of opera – often in bizarre productions that do not appeal to traditionalists and, since younger buyers are not generally opera-lovers, the discs are neither produced very often nor in huge quantities. Some jazz and folk music may be had on them, but not much; these are, after all, not primarily visual media.

For all Norio Ohga’s faults as a record company executive (he is generally considered a failure in not being able to move enough product), his name should go down in history as one

of the great benefactors of mankind. Sort of a combination Eldridge Johnson and Walter Legge, he had sufficiently good taste to provide a small but influential series of classical CDs on Sony's label, and as a developer of devices that make home recording – or independent recording, for that matter – easier and cheaper for the consumer, he has done the world an immense service.

*Women composers emerge, fade, and are forgotten*

It is one of the great ironies of the post-World War II world that labor-saving devices and more free time finally allowed more women to enter the world of classical composition and jazz, yet give them no more outlet for their music to be heard. Gender politics has always played a part in the promotion of any women in the arts – looks and general attractiveness have always influenced not only the way they are marketed but how the public perceives them – and few if any of these artists look like Beyonce Knowles or dress like Madonna.

In the 1970s, especially, a number of wonderfully inventive and highly individual women artists emerged. Among the most vocal was Pauline Oliveros, whose “chance” or random-tonality music was, unfortunately, even less appealing to the average listener than Leif Segerstam's melting clocks of sound. Her early-1970s New York Times article, “And Don't Call Us Lady Composers,” set the tone for the confrontation to come: creative women were here, in your face, and about to bowl over the world. They were here and in your face, to be sure, but once the bowling pins were removed from the lanes there wasn't much for them to knock over.

Geri Allen, an African-American pianist-composer, emerged on the jazz scene in the late 1980s and made a terrific impact on her listeners, but despite an excellent debut album on Blue Note and an equally excellent album on Polygram's JMT label with bassist Charlie Haden (who had played with Ornette Coleman) and drummer Paul Motian (who had played with Bill Evans), she, too, never caught on with the general public.

More recently, another superb pianist, Dena DeRose, has made a tremendous impact on the jazz world, partly because she is moderately good-looking (this is, remember, the “visual age”) and partly because she is one of the very greatest of jazz singers. Like Nat King Cole, she has the uncanny ability to sing and play piano simultaneously, which gives her performances a tremendous visceral impact above and beyond their musical value. Yet there are millions of people who have not only never heard of DeRose, but wouldn't like her even if they heard her, because the music she sings and plays is not within the parameters of modern “pop”—even though one of her albums *does* include the John Lennon song “Imagine.”

Among the most interesting and creative of women classical composers is Nancy Van de Vate. Born into a middle-class household in Plainfield, New Jersey, and raised in a conventional white-bread middle-class family, she was attracted early on to classical music as a personal form of

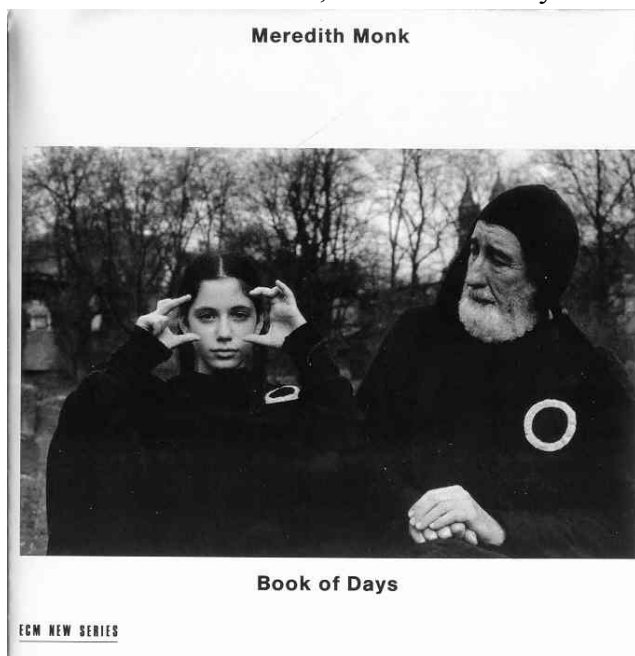




expression. She began writing operas and other works in the early 1960s but found few opportunities to have her music performed. As time went on, her creative output grew and expanded exponentially to include works in virtually every form except the symphony—more operas, short concerted works, and a plethora of chamber music, most of it extraordinarily interesting and all of it well-written—but fewer and fewer chances to have it performed. Eventually she became angry at the entire establishment and moved to Vienna. From her new home base in Austria, she managed to get her works performed not only in that country but also in Latvia and Poland. She is virtually unique among women composers—and, indeed, among composers of either sex—in that she eventually established her own record label, Vienna Modern Masters. Though largely a repository of her own output, the label also includes music of other composers, male and female, whose music she enjoys. Among her finest works is the opera “All Quiet on the Western Front,” based on the excellent anti-war play and featuring some of her most complex and engaging textures.

But having a record label and having good distribution (and marketing!) are two different things. Since Van de Vate’s music is neither popular nor easily assimilated, she often has stacks of CDs that she is unable to move, whereas a few other women composers have been luckier in terms of both their popularity and distribution.

Primary among these is Meredith Monk, the New York-based queen of minimalism. As a vocalist and dancer, she evolved a style based on simple, repetitive rhythmic figures in



which simple, repeated melodic fragments continue or interweave with other fragments, sometimes building up to an impressive whole. Fortunately for her, minimalism became extremely popular in the 1970s through the media-created fame of composer Philip Glass. She was signed during that decade by ECM, the highly eclectic label owned by Manfred Eicher, which also recorded the music of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and pianist Keith Jarrett. As previously mentioned, the AEC never broke through to popularity—their music is far too disjointed, jarring and eclectic to do so—but Jarrett and Monk became strong underground favorites. Still active in New York as of this writing, Monk has created an outstanding

body of work, far more varied in texture and musical concept than most of Glass’s, most of which has been permanently captured in her ECM recordings. Her body of work includes the one-shot “opera epic,” “Atlas,” the growth journey of a young girl who travels the world for adventures. After its premiere at the Houston Grand Opera in the 1990s, “Atlas” disappeared from the repertoire, yet its music can still be enjoyed in the ECM album that was made of it.

Another woman composer who has done well in the marketplace is Libby Larsen. The composer of straightforward, rhythmically interesting and lyrically accessible music, Larsen was signed to a long-term contract by Koch International after her song-cycle based on poems of Emily Dickinson, “Sonnets From the Portuguese,” became a surprise best-seller on an Arleen Augér album in 1993. Since then, Larsen has had a great deal of her output recorded by

Koch, including four symphonies, tone poems, and her Marimba Concerto dedicated to the great jazz vibist Lionel Hampton.

Barbara Kolb, the daughter of Connecticut-based jazz pianist Howard Kolb, has not been as lucky as Monk or Larsen, nor as privately adventurous as Van de Vate, yet some of her surrealistic, complex music has been recorded on the CRI and New World labels. And Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, widely recognized as one of America's finest composers—she was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize for her first symphony—has also had some of her best works recorded by New World, but nothing since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Apparently, even winning the Nobel Prize in music isn't enough to help the promotion of one of the greatest of all living composers.

Though I have focused my attention here on American women, for obvious reasons (not insignificantly, they are more often recorded than others), there are, of course, many other women writing music around the world whose work is either slimly recorded or not recorded at all. Thus we are in an ironic era, one in which women are writing more music than ever before and yet being heard no more (and being no more famous) than they have been in the past.